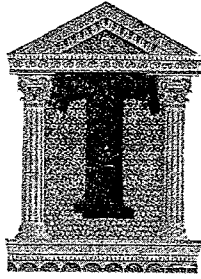


# The Roman Republic 11



**The Beginnings of Rome** Legend has it that the city of Rome was founded by two twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. According to the story, when they were babies, they were thrown into the Tiber River by their wicked uncle. A female wolf saved them from drowning and raised them. Once they grew up, they founded the city and named it for Romulus.

The story of Romulus and Remus is a myth. The actual history behind the founding of Rome is a bit harder to pin down. We know that during the fifth century B.C., when Athens was experiencing its Golden Age, Rome consisted of just a few thousand farmers living on some hills by the Tiber River in Italy. Eventually, several of these villages united to form one town. In time, this town, known as Rome, would become the center of a great empire.

Early Rome was ruled by kings. Very little is known about this period. According to legend, six of the kings were good, kind, and just rulers, but the seventh was harsh and cruel. His name was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (LOO shuhs tahr KWIHN ee us suh PURB us), and about 509 B.C., the citizens of Rome rose in revolt and removed him from power. The Romans replaced their monarchy with an aristocratic **republic**. The king was replaced by two elected officials called *consuls*. These consuls were chosen each year by the Senate, an assembly of 300 Roman aristocrats. The Senate may have existed under the kings, but in the new republic, it grew more powerful. It not only elected the two new consuls every year but also advised them once they were elected.

The idea behind the republican system was that Rome should be ruled neither by a king, as it had been in its earlier days, nor by a

full-fledged democracy in which every citizen could vote on every issue, as was the case in Athens. Instead, republican Rome was ruled by men chosen from among the Roman elite, including consuls and senators.

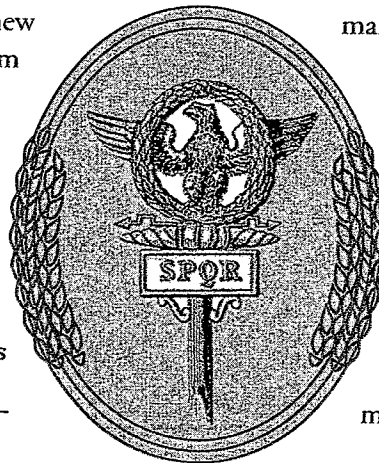
## vocabulary

**republic** a government without a king; republics usually have some elected officials  
**patrician** a member of the ruling class or aristocracy of ancient Rome  
**plebeian** a member of the Roman lower class

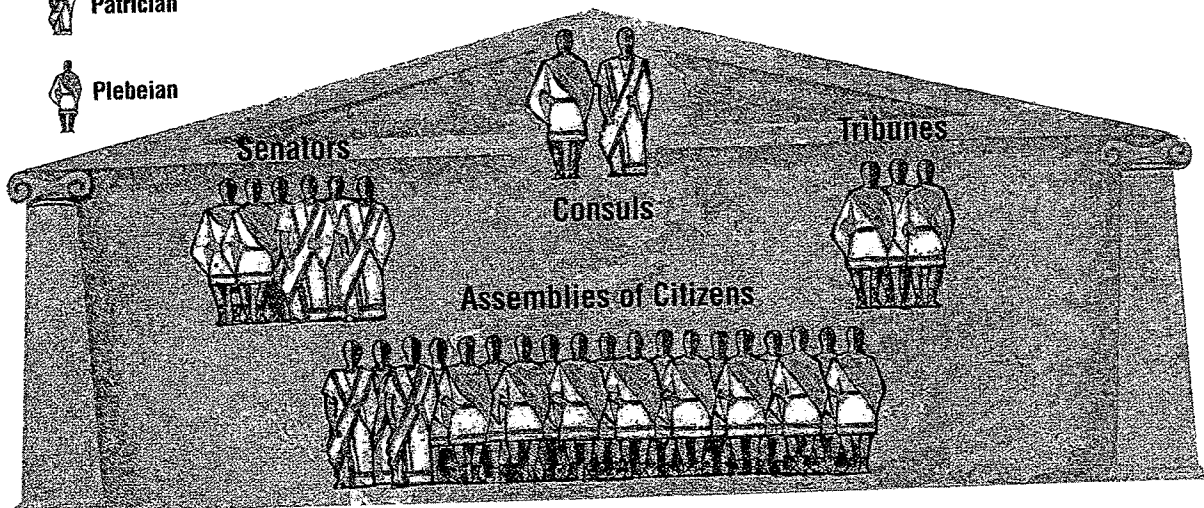
During this early period, Romans were divided into two unequal groups: patricians and plebeians. **Patricians** were members of the aristocracy. These noblemen held almost all the power. The best education was reserved for them, and only patricians could be members of the Senate. **Plebeians** were the common people. Initially, they had few rights and almost no say in how they were governed. For many years there was even a law that prevented plebeians from marrying patricians.

For the first two centuries of Rome's existence, the patricians and plebeians were locked in a struggle with each other. The plebeians wanted rights, and the patricians wanted to keep their power. The struggle between them eventually resulted in many changes that helped to make Rome great.

*In ancient Rome, many public buildings bore the initials SPQR. These stood for S(enatus) P(opulus) Q(ue) R(omanus)—“The Senate and the People of Rome.”*



## GOVERNMENT UNDER THE ROMAN REPUBLIC



*A democratic form of government emerged in Rome with both patricians and plebeians making laws for all citizens.*

To obtain rights and to secure themselves from injustice, the plebeians got organized. When they disagreed with the patricians' attempts to control them, they would leave the city and refuse to listen to the patricians. The plebeians even elected their own leaders, called **tribunes**. Gradually, the plebeians forced the patricians to treat them better and give them a voice in government.

Eventually, the class distinctions between patricians and plebeians faded

away. But there were other distinctions that never faded away. Slavery was widespread in Rome, as it had been in ancient Greece, and women had almost as few rights in Rome as they had had in ancient Athens.

### vocabulary

**tribune**  
representative of the  
plebeian class

peoples. Eventually, they would build a great empire this way.

The Roman army conquered central Italy, then northern Italy. By 275 B.C. the city of Rome governed all of Italy. Within another hundred years, they had conquered nearly all the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

From early on, then, Roman society was based on the army. This determined the most important ideals Romans had. Most of all, Romans admired valor, or bravery, because this was the characteristic that a good soldier needed to have. Romans admired other qualities as well, such as loyalty, duty, honor, and fidelity (faithfulness). These qualities would help them build their republic into a mighty empire.

### How Romans Governed

In the beginning the Roman army was made up of poor farmers who were forced to fight. But once the army began to conquer other peoples, soldiers could bring home plunder, or things of value that they took from those they conquered. Soldiers were also given land as a reward for their service. So some began to see the benefits they could get from fighting in the army. Others saw it as an honor to belong to the Roman army.

### The Roman Republic Grows

During its early years the city of Rome was surrounded by enemies. At first, the Romans had to defend themselves against outsiders who wanted to conquer their city. Eventually, however, they began to push their enemies back. Then, the Romans began to conquer other lands and other

Conquered peoples were organized into provinces, each of which was governed by magistrates answerable to Rome. The Romans also stationed troops in each province to keep order and to carry out whatever the government in Rome decided needed to be done.

When most ancient empires conquered another people, they either wiped out the defeated people or demanded that they pay **tribute**. The Romans governed a little differently. From the beginning, they made the people they conquered part of their republic. They demanded that the people they conquered serve in their army. Like all the other soldiers in the army, if they fought well, they would be rewarded. This was different from what had happened before. Conquered people were not crushed under the heel of an occupying army; they could actually benefit from the new government.

#### **vocabulary**

**tribute** money or goods that conquered peoples were forced to give to those who conquered them

The Romans did something else that was new. Frequently, they

made these conquered people citizens of Rome. Thus, the conquered people gained political rights. They found themselves part of a growing republic that often gave them a better style of life than they had enjoyed before they were conquered.

The Romans did not do these things out of kindness. They had a purpose. It would have been impossible for a tiny group of Romans to try to control the many different peoples that were part of their growing republic. By making it in people's best interest to be loyal to the Roman Republic, and by making the city of Rome the center of everything—government, trade, and culture—the Romans were building a strong, united society.

## **The Republic Faces the Future**

As the republic grew, so did the power of the Senate. It evolved to include plebeians as well as patricians, and it became the chief governing body of the republic. The Senate had to make decisions on all sorts of things. It passed laws, decided what the army should do, dealt with issues at home and issues that came up in newly conquered lands. It was also a court of law and sat in judgment in certain cases.

Since the army was so successful, Rome eventually became very rich. Since so much plunder was being brought back from successful military campaigns, Roman citizens didn't have to pay taxes. Generals and other army leaders became wealthy and spent their riches on building temples and arches to celebrate their victories.

Roman men were eager to make their way in the world by being successful soldiers. They would gain wealth if they were victorious in battle, but they would also gain power. They would have important positions in society.

All of this meant that the Roman economy, system of government, and society in general relied on the continued success of the army. If the Romans were to prosper, there always had to be more lands to conquer, more plunder to bring home, and more citizens to include in the republic. The leading members of Roman society knew that this was important.

There were also other problems with this way of doing things, as the Romans soon learned. If the army was the place an ambitious Roman could make himself a good career, then the army was the way to power. And this way to power posed a threat to those already in power. The army could potentially be used against the Senate and the rest of the government. This was a major problem that the Romans found themselves struggling with after 100 B.C.